

VZCZCXRO3321
RR RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHJS #0039 0850519
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 250519Z MAR 08
FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0184
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0171
INFO RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0014
RUEHJS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0096
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0094
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0189

UNCLAS SURABAYA 000039

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EAST NUSA TENGGARA: EASTER STABBING OF EAST TIMORESE REFUGEE
HIGHLIGHTS COMMUNAL TENSIONS

REF: JAKARTA 451 -- NTT POLICE, TNI SECURITY COOPERATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Easter stabbing of an East Timorese refugee and the subsequent revenge destruction of 11 houses in a local village highlight the continuing tensions between communities in West Timor. The deployment of hundreds of police backed up by army soldiers restored order to the area. As of March 25, the police were still looking for the killers and those responsible for the residential attacks. Local contacts commented that killings and the resulting revenge attacks were not uncommon. End Summary.

¶2. (U) According to press reports, on Saturday, March 22, Paulino Lopes, a refugee from East Timor, was returning home from church when drunken West Timorese youths accosted him and demanded money to buy alcohol. Lopes reportedly refused, was beaten, but escaped and made his way home to Atambua, a city with a significant refugee population. The following day, Easter Sunday, the same drunken youths found and attacked Lopes again. Pushed to the ground, Lopes was fatally stabbed in the neck. Local residents rushed Lopes to the hospital, but he died of his injuries. That same day, the Lopes family gathered an angry mob of refugees to take revenge on the nearby village of Motabuik, burning 11 houses.

¶3. (SBU) According to contacts at local newspaper Timor Express, hundreds of police, backed up by army soldiers, have restored order in both Atambua and Motabuik. The provincial police inspector told ConGen Surabaya that the police were still searching for the youths who attacked Lopes and the individuals who participated in the arson attacks in Motabuik. Local contacts in Atambua and West Timor's capital Kupang told ConGen Surabaya that such killings and revenge attacks were not uncommon. This case received more attention, however, because the attacks took place on Easter in this overwhelmingly Christian province. While local politicians told us previously (reftel) that East Timorese refugees were being successfully absorbed into West Timorese society, this latest incident suggests persistent underlying tensions remain between the two communities.

MCCLELLAND